

BASIC TOUR OUTLINE

2027 CHERRY BLOSSOM TOUR OF NORTHERN JAPAN (SIGNATURE)

START: **(Refer to website for date) from Tokyo**

DURATION: **13 days**

PRICE: **AUD \$10,740 per person**

SINGLE SUPP: **AUD \$2,000 per person**

FINISH: at Sapporo

GROUP size: **8 people**

REF: GSN-27

TOUR OVERVIEW

Discover a gentler, slower-paced Japan during the beautiful cherry blossom season with the 2027 Cherry Blossom Tour of Northern Japan. This 13-day small-group tour starts in Tokyo before travelling through the tranquil Tohoku region's Matsushima, Kakunodate and Hirosaki, and up to the northern island of Hokkaido - home to some of Japan's most breathtaking, yet lesser-known, cherry blossom viewing spots. Here, the blossoms bloom later (from mid to late April), offering you the chance to enjoy the scenery with fewer crowds and more time to appreciate each moment.

Throughout the journey, you'll experience the genuine warmth and hospitality of the Tohoku people, dine on exceptional regional cuisine, and soak in soothing onsen (natural hot spring baths) - a cherished Japanese tradition ideal for relaxation. You'll also wander through beautifully preserved samurai districts, peaceful rural landscapes, and charming historical towns that are seldom visited by mainstream tourists.

This is the perfect tour for those seeking a calm, culturally rich, and scenic Japan travel experience - ideal for mature explorers who enjoy slow travel, comfort, and meaningful connection. Discover Northern Japan, one of the country's best-kept secrets, at the loveliest time of year.

*Accommodation will be as planned below or similar.

DAY	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
1	Airport meet and greet on arrival	Welcome to Japan and your 2027 Cherry Blossom Tour of Northern Japan! Upon arrival at one of Tokyo's international airports, you'll be warmly greeted by your Journey to the East guide and escorted to your hotel via airport bus or train for a relaxed and stress-free start to your holiday. Today is an arrival day with no scheduled group activities, allowing you to settle in at your own pace. Take a gentle stroll around your hotel's neighbourhood to get a first taste of Tokyo's everyday life. As this tour focuses on the hidden gems and late-blooming cherry blossoms of Northern Japan, it does not include a guided tour of Tokyo. If this is your first visit to Japan, we highly recommend spending extra time exploring the capital's rich traditions, iconic gardens, and vibrant local districts before the tour begins. Many guests choose to arrive a day or two early to ease into the journey. If you'd like to	No meals	KKR Hotel Tokyo [Deluxe Twin]

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		extend your stay, we will be delighted to arrange additional nights at the tour hotel. Feel free to contact us to tailor your pre-tour experience.		
2	Transfer to and guided tour of Shiogama and Matsushima	This morning, you board Japan's iconic shinkansen (bullet train) and travel north to Sendai, where you transfer by private minivan to the charming coastal town of Shiogama. Your visit begins at Shiogama Shrine, one of Tohoku's most historically important Shinto sites. In spring, more than 200 cherry trees bloom across the grounds, including varieties that are officially designated as National Natural Monuments. This makes Shiogama one of the region's most culturally significant cherry blossom locations - yet it remains blissfully free from the large crowds often found in Tokyo or Kyoto. After enjoying the serene beauty of the shrine, you'll sit down to a delicious sushi lunch. Shiogama is renowned for its exceptionally fresh seafood, thanks to one of Japan's busiest fishing ports. Following lunch, board a leisurely bay cruise to Matsushima, celebrated as one of Japan's Three Most Scenic Views (Nihon Sankei). As your boat glides across the water, you'll enjoy close-up views of more than 250 small islands, each topped with wind-shaped pine trees that cling to dramatic rocky outcrops - a landscape long admired in Japanese art, poetry, and travel writing. Your day ends in Matsushima, where the region's seafood traditions shine. This evening's buffet-style dinner at your hotel features fresh local seafood and classic Tohoku specialties, offering a delicious introduction to Northern Japan's coastal cuisine.	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Matsushima Taikanso [Japanese style room with Western beds]
3	Guided tour of Matsushima	This morning, you continue exploring the natural beauty of Matsushima Bay, where stretches of cherry blossom trees line the coastline. Enjoy a gentle walk among the blossoms, taking in the fresh sea air and the peaceful atmosphere that makes Matsushima one of Japan's most cherished scenic destinations. Your cultural journey continues as you visit three of the region's most significant historic sites: Zuiganji Temple, the illustrious Zen temple founded in the 9th century and rebuilt by the warlord Date Masamune; Entsu-in, known for its beautiful gardens and elegant mausoleum; and Godaidō, a small but iconic temple hall perched on a rocky islet overlooking the bay. These temples offer a fascinating window into northern Japan's spiritual heritage. The afternoon is free to enjoy Matsushima at your own pace. You might like to stroll to Ojima Island, a compact and tranquil spot home to atmospheric pilgrim caves carved into the cliffs, or treat yourself to Matsushima's famed oysters, a local specialty and a popular lunchtime choice. This evening, unwind with another leisurely buffet dinner at your hotel, showcasing fresh seafood and regional Tohoku flavours.	Breakfast, Dinner	Matsushima Taikanso [Japanese style room with Western beds]

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4	Transfer to and guided tour of Kakunodate	Today, you travel north on the Shinkansen to the former castle town of Kakunodate in Akita Prefecture. Often called Tohoku's "Little Kyoto", Kakunodate preserves the rich crafts and traditions introduced from the old capital when this northern fortress town was established. Although the original castle no longer stands, the samurai and merchant districts have remained remarkably intact since the 1600s, making Kakunodate one of Japan's most picturesque and photogenic towns. During your visit, you explore well-preserved samurai residences, walking through tranquil streets lined with traditional wooden houses. You also visit the Cherry Bark Work Museum, where you can admire exquisite items crafted from fine strips of cherry bark - a centuries-old local art unique to this region. You will stay two nights in Kakunodate at a charming local hotel, providing a warm and authentic experience. This evening, enjoy a dinner featuring regional cuisine, offering a taste of Akita Prefecture's distinctive culinary traditions.	Breakfast, Dinner	Tamachi Bukeyashiki Hotel [Western style twin room]
5	Guided tour of Lake Tazawa and Kakunodate	This morning, your journey takes you to Tazawa-ko, Japan's deepest lake, renowned for its crystal-clear blue waters and spectacular mountain setting. Your guide will share the legend of the female dragon spirit said to dwell in the lake, and you'll visit the associated shrine and iconic statue, a serene spot steeped in local folklore. On the return journey to Kakunodate, enjoy a unique cultural experience with an exclusive zazen (Zen meditation) session at a local temple, offering a glimpse into centuries-old spiritual practice. Afterwards, savour a farm-to-table lunch at a nearby farm restaurant, highlighting the region's fresh, seasonal ingredients. In the afternoon, return to central Kakunodate for a hands-on experience with the town's famous cherry bark craft, creating your own piece under the guidance of skilled artisans. The rest of the day is free to explore at your leisure. Stroll through the atmospheric samurai streets, framed by weeping cherry trees, or wander along the Hinokinai River, where a tunnel of over 400 cherry trees creates one of Japan's most celebrated cherry blossom sights. Take time to browse the traditional shops, offering locally made crafts and food items such as miso paste, dashi stock, and pickles, for an authentic taste of northern Japan's culture and heritage.	Breakfast, Lunch	Tamachi Bukeyashiki Hotel [Western style twin room]

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6	Transfer to and guided tour of Hirosaki	This morning, a private minibus takes you through the scenic countryside of central Tohoku to Hirosaki, a historic castle town in Aomori Prefecture, nestled at the foot of Mt Iwaki. In spring, Hirosaki Castle Park transforms into a breathtaking sea of pink as thousands of cherry trees bloom, and locals gather to enjoy the sun after a long winter. You explore the ancient remains of Hirosaki Castle, where the cherry blossoms beautifully frame the castle's stone walls and moats, creating one of Japan's most iconic hanami (cherry blossom viewing) experiences. You also visit Neputamura, a cultural hall showcasing Aomori's famous Neputa Festivals, with displays highlighting the region's vibrant traditional floats, music, and local customs. In the evening, enjoy dinner accompanied by a live Tsugaru shamisen performance. This energetic local style of Japan's three-stringed instrument brings northern folk songs to life, offering a vivid and immersive taste of Aomori's rich musical heritage.	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Art Hotel Hirosaki City [Western style room]
7	Guided tour of Ajigasawa	Today is a relaxing mid-point of your tour with a scenic day trip into the countryside of Aomori Prefecture, a region celebrated as Japan's apple heartland. Travel through picturesque apple orchards with views of Mt Iwaki, and enjoy the serene beauty of the rural landscape, dotted with traditional villages and blossoming trees. For lunch, savour an exclusive meal prepared for Journey to the East guests by an acclaimed local chef, highlighting the region's freshest seasonal produce and culinary traditions. After a day of gentle exploration and fresh country air, return to Hirosaki for a free evening, allowing you to relax or wander the charming streets at your own pace, perhaps enjoying the softly illuminated cherry blossoms that linger around the town.	Breakfast, Lunch	Art Hotel Hirosaki City [Western style room]
8	Transfer to and guided tour of Hakodate	Today, board the Shinkansen for a journey to Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island, travelling through the Seikan Tunnel, an engineering marvel that stretches 53.9 km and reaches 100 meters below the seabed. You arrive in Hakodate, a historic port city with a distinctly European atmosphere. During Japan's period of national isolation (sakoku), Hakodate was one of the few ports officially open to foreign traders, including Russians, and traces of this international influence remain visible in the city's architecture and streetscapes. Begin your exploration with a visit to Goryokaku Park, home to a rare Western-style star-shaped fortress built in the mid-19th century to defend Hokkaido against potential Western incursions. Stroll among the fort's moats and ramparts while learning about its fascinating history. As evening falls, ascend Mount Hakodate for one of Japan's most celebrated night views, where the illuminated harbour and city lights stretch out below in a breathtaking panorama. End the day with a delicious dinner at a local eatery, sampling Hakodate's renowned fresh seafood and regional specialties.	Breakfast, Dinner	Century Marina Hakodate [Deluxe Twin]

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9	Morning guided tour of Hakodate	Today begins with an early-morning visit to Hakodate's famous seafood market, renowned for its premium crab, squid, and other fresh catches brought in daily from local waters. Afterwards, board one of Hakodate's vintage streetcars for a ride to the historic Motomachi district, perched on the city's hillside. Take a guided walking tour through this charming area, stopping at landmarks such as the former British Consulate and the Red Brick Warehouse district along the waterfront, offering a vivid glimpse into Hakodate's early cosmopolitan history. Hakodate's story is not only one of international trade but also of cultural exchange with the Ainu, Hokkaido's indigenous people. Visit the Ainu Museum, a small yet insightful space where you can learn about Ainu traditions, crafts, and daily life, gaining a deeper understanding of Hokkaido's rich cultural tapestry. The afternoon and evening are free to explore at your own pace. Sample Hakodate's renowned seafood at a casual izakaya or enjoy a steaming bowl of local ramen noodles. Your guide will be happy to offer recommendations for an authentic culinary experience in this historic port city.	Breakfast	Century Marina Hakodate [Deluxe Twin]
10	Transfer to and guided tour of Lake Toya	This morning, travel further north to Lake Toya in Hokkaido aboard a private minibus. A favourite leisure destination for locals, Lake Toya is renowned for its calm waters, surrounding forests, and the dramatic presence of Mt Usu, an active volcano. The area also offers striking views of Mt Yotei, often called Hokkaido's "Mt Fuji" for its perfectly conical shape. Take the ropeway to the summit of Mt Usu, where you can admire sweeping views of Lake Toya and the nearby Showa-shinzan lava dome, formed by volcanic activity in 1943. This panoramic vantage point offers a fascinating perspective on the region's dynamic volcanic landscape and natural beauty. After exploring, retreat to a peaceful lakeside resort for an overnight stay, providing a serene setting to unwind and enjoy the tranquil scenery of Lake Toya.	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Lake Toya Tsuruga Resort Hikari no Uta [Japanese-Western room with Private Onsen]
11	Guided tour of Yoichi and Otaru	Today, you travel to your final destination, Sapporo, with stops at two charming towns to the west: Yoichi and Otaru. Yoichi is renowned for its whisky distillery and fertile orchards, producing a variety of seasonal fruits, reflecting the region's rich agricultural heritage. Next, explore Otaru, once a bustling trading hub. Many of its historic stone and brick warehouses have been beautifully repurposed into museums, glass workshops, craft breweries, and sake distilleries, preserving the town's industrial charm. Stroll along the central canal, lined with Victorian-era street lamps and elegant historic buildings, and visit the Aoyama Villa, the former home of a prosperous herring merchant, offering insight into Otaru's golden age of trade. After arriving in Sapporo, enjoy a relaxed dinner at a local izakaya, sampling Hokkaido's regional dishes and soaking up the lively atmosphere of the city.	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Sapporo Grand Hotel [Standard Large Twin/Double]

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12	Guided tour of Sapporo	This morning, your guide leads you on a walking tour of Sapporo, Hokkaido's vibrant capital. Begin with a visit to the Sapporo TV Tower for panoramic views of the city, then explore the historic Clock Tower, a symbol of the city's pioneering past. Continue to the former Agricultural College, where charming weatherboard barns reflect its 150-year history of introducing livestock farming to Hokkaido - a cornerstone of the region's agricultural industry today. For lunch, consider sampling classic Sapporo-style miso ramen, a regional specialty celebrated across Japan. The afternoon is free to explore Sapporo at your leisure, whether strolling through its lively streets, visiting local shops, or enjoying the city's parks and cafés. In the evening, gather together for a farewell dinner, sharing stories and memories from your journey through the cherry blossoms, historic towns, and natural wonders of northern Japan.	Breakfast, Dinner	Sapporo Grand Hotel [Standard Large Twin/Double]
13	Departure	After breakfast, check out of your hotel, marking the conclusion of your 2027 Cherry Blossom Tour of Northern Japan. From here, you may take a domestic flight from Sapporo to Tokyo's international airports for your onward journey home. If you wish to extend your stay in Japan, we would be delighted to help you plan a personalised post-tour extension, whether it's exploring another region, enjoying additional cherry blossoms, or discovering Japan's cultural and natural treasures at a leisurely pace. Speak with us to tailor your next adventure.	Breakfast	
	Inclusions for Group Tour	■ 12 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns) ■ All breakfasts, 6 lunches and 8 dinners ■ Airport meet & greet on arrival ■ Hotel transfer by public transport on arrival ■ All local transport (train, bus and private minivans) ■ Airport transfer from the hotel by public transport on departure ■ Expert English-speaking tour guides (locally licensed) ■ Cultural activities and entry fees are included in the itinerary ■ Luggage transfers (1 piece per person)		

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	Exclusions for Group Tour	■ International and domestic airfare (unless otherwise stated) ■ Travel insurance ■ Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages (except the 1st drink at each meal) ■ Tips and gratuities ■ Transport during free time ■ Personal expenses (laundry, coin-locker, internet, telephone etc.) ■ Visa (if required)		